

Form and Figure, Image and Object

A Senior Thesis

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by

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This research project has been a study in form and figuration and attempts to present these two approaches within a single work. I first became interested in this topic after facing a material and content dilemma. I found my practice in between interests with one being, abstract methodology as opposed to producing representative imagery, and the other being, the processes of digital versus physical creation. I was struck with the questions: what is the role of the artist's hand within an image and how does the process of its creation affect its consumption?

The modernist interpretation of modern art...partakes above all in an ontological project: once art was liberated from the constraints of representation, it had to justify its existence as the search for its own essence.¹

I had just created a piece [Pic 1], which brought into question these concerns and marks the starting point for this research project. It was the first piece I had made that was in-between definitions, which sparked an interest in philosophical issues of identification.

My initial proposition for this research project was to place my practice in an in-between state. The belief behind this methodology was that to position one quality in relation to its opposing quality would help illuminate both of their identities. To quote Hubert Damicsh in his book, A Theory of /Cloud/,

The ceaseless exchange of oppositions and functions... is characteristic of type of thought that systematically plays upon opposition as a means of

¹ Bois, Yve-Alain, *Formless: A User's Guide*, Pg 25

expression and in which every term needs its contrary if its meaning is to be revealed in all its complexity.²

This quote comes from a section titled Ying/Yang, which presents various relationships, such as the creative relationship between ink and brush, and expounds that one requires the other and that one is not favored over the other but work together in unison. This is a philosophy that has been threaded throughout this project.

Extraction of the Frame

My proposed project was to place my painting practice in relation to three-dimensional space; a quality most at home within sculpture. My intention was to perform and capture a single brush stroke upon the surface of a sphere. I became interested in the sphere because of its continuity within 3-dimensional space. There is no discernable beginning or end to its form and no points or vertices to become fixated on. Its geometry tends to provoke a kind of continuous gaze. The structure I designed was a collection of these painted spheres oriented on a single plane. Together they would comprise the conceptual surface of the entire image. [Pic 2]

Opposing the sphere or circle with the cube or square was also another approach involved in this project. I became interested in the square because of its significance in defining space. It is the most minimal form that represents a two-dimensional space, consisting of a two sets of parallel lines, which indicate the presence of an x and y-axis. When the concept of a square is indefinitely repeated, a grid is formed, which allows for mathematical relationships to emerge between points of interest. What I'm most interested in about this shape is its identity as a signifier for orientation, which led me to question the role of the frame in relation to an image.

² Damisch, Hubert, A Theory of /Cloud/, Pg 216

Upon reading an essay by philosopher, WV Quine on some issues involving the notion of identity, this proposed piece began to dismantle itself. In this essay, Quine elucidates Hume's theory, stating:

...the idea of external objects arises from an error of identification. Various similar impressions separated in time are mistakenly treated as identical; and then, as a means of resolving this contradiction of identifying momentary events, which are separated in time, we invent a new non-momentary object to serve as subject matter of our statement of identity.³

Quine simplifies this theory by stating that, "there is a direct connection between identity and the positing of processes, or time-extended objects." [Quine, pg 285] This piece was intended to represent processes by having a painting of a portrait organize and "paint" itself in real time. But to address the notion of identity within a mechanical structure did not seem to fit anymore. The important point that I wanted to convey was this moment of the conceptual movement between form and identification. Quine goes on to state,

Pointing is of itself ambiguous as to the temporal spread of the indicated object.⁴

After reading this, I asked myself what was I pointing to and who was it that was looking. And how were they looking? The viewer in relation to the work then became a factor for consideration. This proposed piece suddenly seemed too harsh a gesture. The scale of this piece was originally intended to be a little larger than the size of the human body so that it could involve viscerally the viewer's own sense of body placement in the environment. This draft seemed to place the viewer in a static and submissive role, which I did not

³ Quine, W. V., 'Identity, Ostention, and Hypostasis.' Pg 285

⁴ Quine, W. V., 'Identity, Ostention, and Hypostasis.' Pg 285

want to provoke. So I sought out subtler ways to involve the viewer in the act of looking rather than focusing on body placement.

One method was to have the viewer organize and create the image themselves by moving these painted spheres into position [Pic 3]. Another was to have the spheres stacked atop of table. The image that was to occupy space was slowly becoming disoriented, as there was no frame or rectangle that supported this image.

Implementation of Frame

What is at stake in this conflict is whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or as objects: and what decides their identity as painting is their confronting of the demand that they hold as shapes. Otherwise they are experienced as nothing more than objects.⁵

The piece I have come to make is meant to reside in between the state of a painting and an object. It is intended to allow the viewer the choice to see it figuratively as an object or formally as an image. In the above quote by Fried, he proclaims that paintings are seen as paintings and not just as objects because of their strength in holding as shapes. I believe the frame is essential for accomplishing this as it confines the viewer's attention to an internal situation within the work as oppose to the external situation the object is in. My piece is meant to include the external space within the internal space of the piece that is bordered by a distinguished frame.

To present this idea, I've left evidence of its identity as a collection of disparate objects but have arranged them using pictorial considerations and vocabularies. Manufacturing marks on the 2X4s, which comprise the frame, are intentionally made

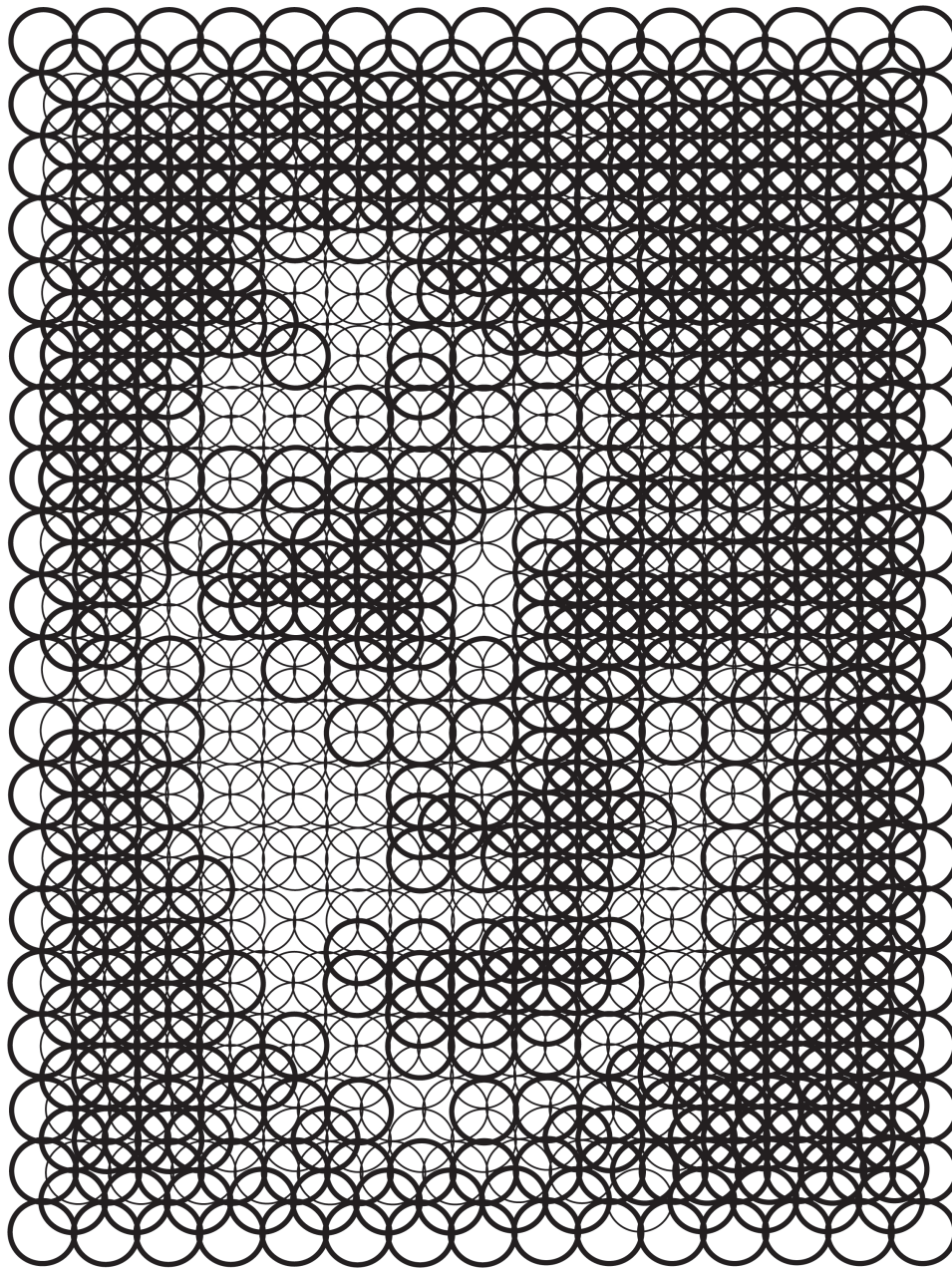
⁵ Fried, Martin, 'Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews'

evident as well as the tensile quality of the metal, which is stuffed into the shape of a grid. Highlighting the material nature of the object is important to piece as well as for my practice in general. This has roots in the philosophies of the Gutai movement in Japan and the Abstract Expressionist movement in America. The object itself is oriented along with the plane of the wall, which seeks to confront the viewer frontally as would be the viewing experience of an image. There is a space to look *into* but instead of an illusory space this piece presents an actual space. The paint within this piece is *placed*. It is not manipulated but is merely present. The intention behind this is to put the paint in an observable situation. It is put within a space that reflects what is within it. So the paint, in essence, is coloring a surface as is its nature but instead of upon a surface it might be better to say it is within the surface. The paint's role within this piece acts as both a figure (material identity) and a form (shape).. The paint, in this deconstructed and extracted context, derives its meaning from its *placement* within a situation that hinges on its surrounding environment and the necessary presence of a viewer to make a choice as to whether to define or observe.

The last action to take place within this piece was to spray paint black over the color within this piece. Whereas the rest of the gestures were the result of a process of thought before action, this gesture was the result of action before thought. I had been using black spray paint in a number of side projects by spray-painting white brush strokes on white canvas to create a kind of hyper-real or photographic looking brush stroke. In this piece, it seeks to do the same by flattening the actual space within the piece. Though this was an act that essentially covered up or canceled out the color within the piece, it

seems to animate its presence when observing the piece. It appears burned or charred as though the piece were placed near a flame, hence the title of this piece is Icarus.

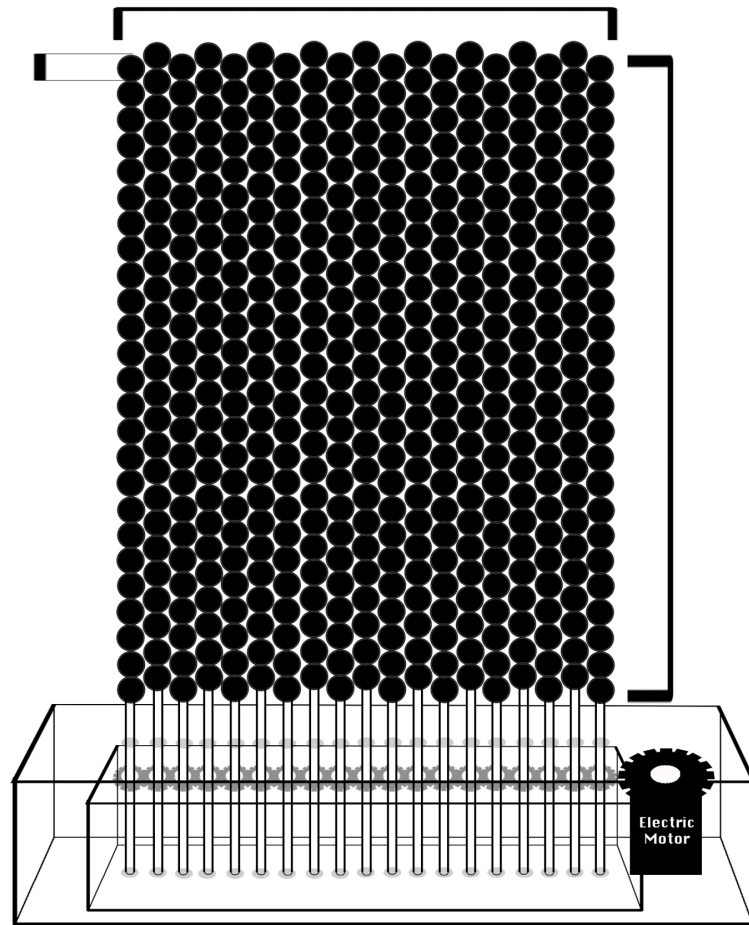
To exhibit this research project required amassing the many experiments that happened along the way and displaying them in such a way as to highlight each moment and step within the process. The exhibition heavily relied on the space of the gallery, and encouraged cross connections between each stage and the final product. Again, referencing the idea of the other as equal, these stages and experiments were displayed in such a way as to render them equally as important to the final product. Aesthetically, I was inspired by the idea of a template to dictate the exhibition format; akin to what one would encounter on an internet website, where there are hyperlinks with which one can further delve into more specific information. The room and its cubic nature became a space to place things much like the placement of the spheres within the final piece itself. Parts and pieces were leaned against the walls as opposed to hung upon the wall referencing the presence of the physical force of gravity, whereas other moments, parts seemed to defy gravity. For all of the images (as opposed to objects) that were displayed, I wanted to make ostensible the apparatus that was holding the images to the wall. The intention being to again reference gravity and the ephemeral nature of the identity of an image.



Self-Portrait, 2011

“Analytically breaking down the edifice of objective reality so that an underlying sheer ephemerally is revealed. Dematerializing the object, be it the artwork or the self.”⁶

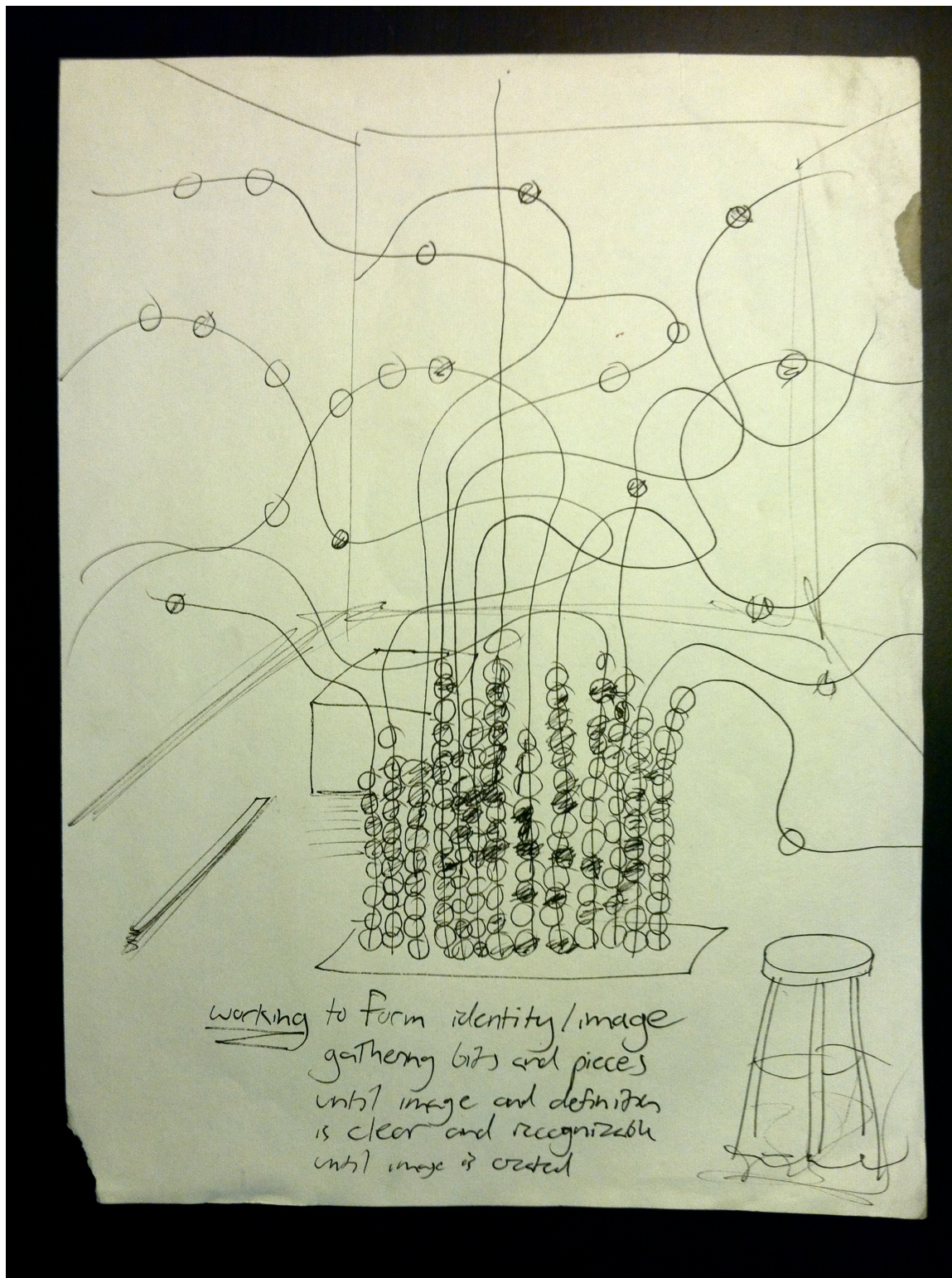
⁶ Epstein, Mark. "Sip My Ocean, Emptiness as Inspiration." *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. By Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob. Berkeley: University of California, 2004. 29-35. Print.



Computer Sketch for Proposed Piece, 2012

“The quiet conviction that all play occurs where phantoms ceaselessly substitute one for another. Allowing the natural algebra of the mind to operate out in the open. Seeing the world as a landscape of interlocking cogs. Observing it from a certain and constant distance. But what distance exactly? No question could be more contentious. Adding this last doubt, then, to a trail of other gnawing uncertainties.”⁷

⁷ Epstein, Mark. "Sip My Ocean, Emptiness as Inspiration." *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. By Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane. Jacob. Berkeley: University of California, 2004. 29-35. Print.

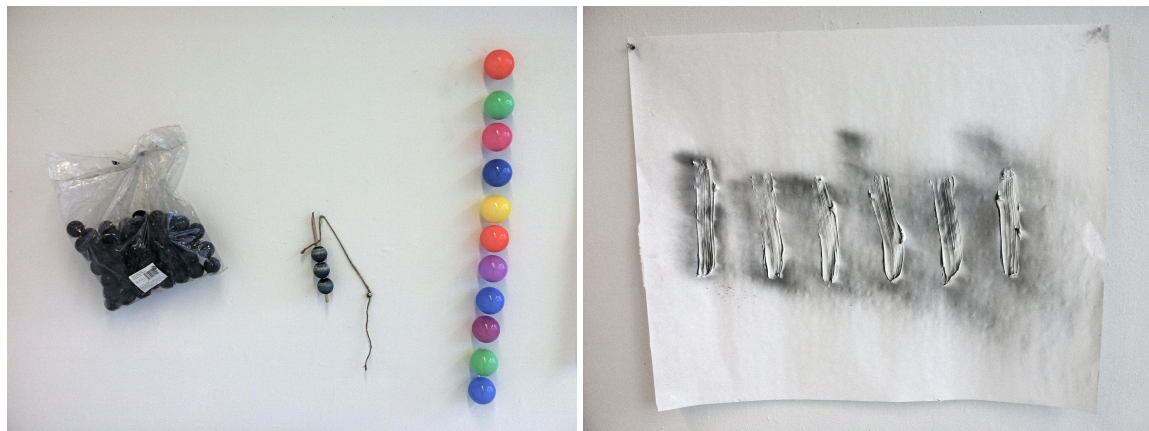
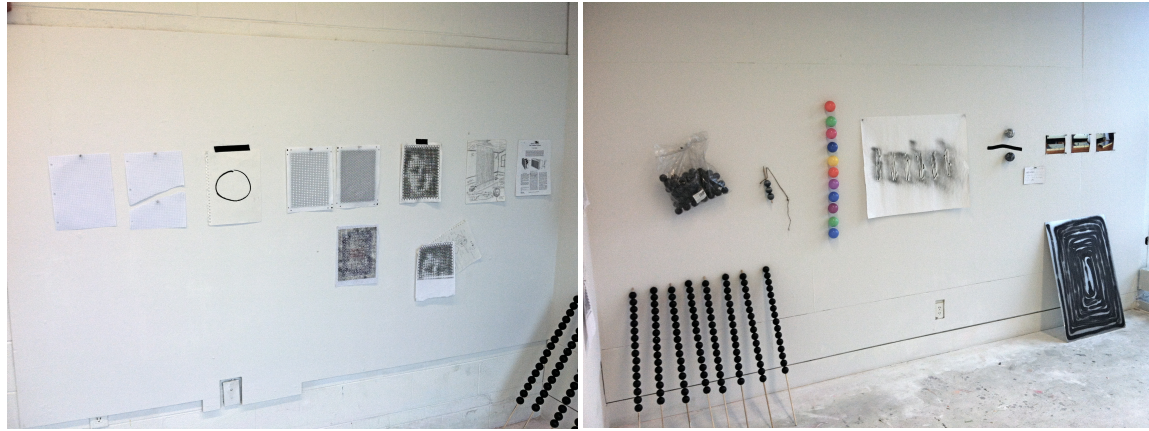


Propositional Sketch, 2012



Icarus, 2013

Exhibition Pictures



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